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Front matter, vol. 19, issue 2

Abstract

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Articles

Aping the Ape: Kafka's "Report to an Academy"

Ziad Elmarsafy

159

Abstract. The "Report to an Academy" narrates a curious situation: an ape presents (or rather, performs) a report to an academy. What he presents is an autobiography. Like so much in Kafka, the "Report" is a parable about writing in general and about the writer's identity in particular. This essay attempts to address these issues through a close reading of Kafka's text against Blanchot's *L'espace littéraire*. Central to this endeavour is an analysis of the ape's use of the first-person pronoun as someone who fashions himself while, at the same time, presenting a theatrical autobiography featuring the self in question. My reading then moves on to analyze the act of writing as a negotiation of the passage between self and other, framed as it is by the theatrical context of Kafka's parable. (ZE)

The Conspiracy of the Miscellaneous in *Foucault's Pendulum*

Ken Kirkpatrick

171

Abstract. Like *Name of the Rose*, *Foucault's Pendulum* grows out of and comments on Umberto Eco's theoretical work. Eco's decision to turn to a conspiracy, rather than a straight detective format for his second novel fits with his recent concern about how interpretative communities function in a period of divisive, diffuse critical theory. Yet *Foucault's Pendulum* does not merely amplify or dramatize his position; rather, it undermines it by becoming excessively involved in generating conspiracy. It is a satire in which the thing satirized proves more interesting and engaging than the satirical position.

Nevertheless, Eco does raise concerns about the conspiratorial, especially the way in which it invalidates ironic detachment and solidarity at the same time, making conspirators inevitable victims of their own conspiracy. And he suggests an important extension of the relation between signs and interpretation: if the detective novel, like *Name of the Rose*, deals with the special referentiality of signs as clues, the conspiratorial novel, like *Foucault's Pendulum*, deals with the "paranoid" side of unlimited interpretation—the possibility that every sign, not arbitrarily but capriciously, can reveal an excess of design. (KK)

The Perilous Journey from Melancholy to Love: A Kristevan Reading of *Le Médianoche amoureux*

Karen D. Levy

185

Abstract. Since the publication of Michel Tournier's first novel *Vendredi ou les limbes du Pacifique* in 1967, in which his protagonist Robinson makes fruitful the very earth of his desert island and eventually accedes to the cosmic transcendence embodied in his mentor and companion Vendredi, this contemporary French writer has boldly explored alternative forms of sexual expression that challenge traditional biological definitions of identity as well as norms of accepted behavior. The basis of his investigations is the anguish-ridden separation from the maternal, as experienced under diverse manifestations usually by male characters, and the irremediable solitude which then stretches over that empty space. In this study, we shall explore Tournier's latest and perhaps most unexpected treatment of the phenomenon of separation and loss as depicted in his latest anthology of short stories *Le Médianoche amoureux* from the point of view of two of Julia Kristeva's most recent theoretical analyses. Her works probe precisely the kind of psychological wounds from which Tournier's protagonists suffer and, as we shall see, suggest possibilities for healing that significantly enhance our understanding of his undertaking. Kristeva's discussion of melancholy in *Soleil noir; Dépression et mélancolie* and her demystifying analysis of the intricacies of amatory discourse in *Histoires d'amour* will enable us to discern the kind of movement that draws the disparate stories of *Le Médianoche amoureux* together and will reveal how this latest of Tournier's works greatly extends the scope of his preoccupations without closing any of the other doors he has so daringly opened. (KDL)

Twentieth-Century Latin American Literary Studies and Cultural Autonomy

Naomi Lindstrom

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Abstract. Since the 1920s, when scholars first began to specialize in Latin American writing, the subject of Latin American literary studies has grown from a small subset of Spanish and Portuguese literary research and teaching to become the largest field within Hispanism and a significant presence in comparative literature. The expansion of their place in the academic world has often prompted students of Latin American literature to wonder whether, in being swept into the mainstream, their field has not left out of account the historical situations of Latin American nations. These reflections lead critics back to a problem that has troubled Latin American thinkers since Independence: the achievement, or erosion, of cultural autonomy. Though undeniably close to major powers, the Latin American nations are unequal partners in trade and cultural exchange. Corresponding to their uneven and shifting relations with Europe and later the United States, their cultural life evolves following a distinctive historical dynamic. This article considers recent efforts by scholars and essayists to characterize the features that distinguish Latin America from more politically and economically advantaged nations. Special attention goes to those scholars who, drawing on anthropological research, examine communicative and expressive practices of indigenous origin, and those who borrow from economic theory to view Latin America as shaped by its history of dependence on more powerful nations and regions. (NL)

Writing a Dynamic Identity: Self-Criticism in the Work of Tchicaya U Tam'Si

Chaibou Elhadji Oumarou

223

Abstract. Very few Africans have had the courage to express their outrage at the stifling African traditions with the vigor and consistency of U Tam'Si. In fact, self-criticism is a major theme in Tchicaya's work as he strives to build a dynamic identity through a dynamic writing style. A dynamic identity changes with time and it is directed toward the future as opposed to static identity, which is concerned with only the past. This essay problematizes his efforts to create that identity and explores the rationale behind his self-criticism. Not content with his identity, he looks for a dynamic model that would help him free himself from both the vestiges of colonialism and from the stifling African traditions. The only true identity is created through (self-) questioning, Tchicaya U Tam'Si answers in his work. Without sure and dynamic identity, there is no sure stance from which one can look at oneself with the smile of a free person. (CEO)

A Contemporary Fairy Tale: García Márquez' "El rastro de tu sangre en la nieve"

Arnold M. Penuel

239

Abstract. The pattern usually found in fairy tales is for the hero or heroine to struggle against, and finally overcome, what seem to be overwhelming odds, after which he or she lives happily ever after. This pattern, according to Bruno Bettelheim, is emblematic of the struggle required of every individual in real life in order to develop the maturity to cope with, and thrive in, the world. García Márquez' story, "El rastro de tu sangre en la nieve," whose dominant intertext is the fairy tale, turns this pattern on its head. Handicapped by privileged upbringing, cultural narcissism, and the necessity of adapting to the demands of a different culture, Billy Sánchez, the hero, or perhaps better, the antihero of "El rastro," utterly fails to master the challenges he meets; rather than rising to a higher level of maturity, in the end he reverts to an infantile way of coping with the world. A Colombian from Cartagena de Indias, Billy's inability to adapt to the French mode of being illuminates certain differences between Hispanic and French cultures. Implicit in the story of Billy's failure is the suggestion that to get along in today's interdependent world one needs a cosmopolitan education; knowledge of the ways of a single culture is simply not adequate preparation for life in the "global village." (AMP)

The Lessons of the Living Dead: Marcel's Journey from Balbec to Douville-Féterne in Proust's *Cities of the Plain: Part Two*

Jonathan Warren

257

Abstract. By analyzing the narrative of Marcel's journey by the "little train" from Balbec to Douville-Féterne the essay engages with the Proust criticism of Georges Poulet, Paul de Man, and Julia Kristeva to support Hayden White's claim that "it is legitimate to read Proust's narrative as an allegory of figuration itself." Like the Madeleine episode, this one serves as a point from which retrospection and prospection radiate. Central to the discussion is the description of Verdurins' dinner party guests as they stand ready to board the train on the platform at Graincourt: their vivacity, compared to a sort of extinction, suggests a chiasmus between life and death, past and present, experience and reading, and phenomenon and figuration that enriches and integrates Poulet's phenomenological glosses, de Man's rhetorical analysis, and the Kristevan approach to Proust's text. In close proximity to the Verdurins' guests, Marcel is struck chiefly by their remoteness, their pastness, their distance: the figural and phenomenal instability of space and time finally converge in Marcel himself as Proust effects a biblical joke. (JW)

Hervé Guibert: Writing the Spectral Image

Donna Wilkerson

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Abstract. This paper explores the relationship existing between AIDS (in particular the body-with-AIDS or the *corps sidaïque*), writing, and the spectral image in Hervé Guibert. While taking into account postmodern theory on the image, photography, and the notion of the “real,” this essay examines the similitude between the image as plague and AIDS in order to reveal some central components of Guibert’s postmodern conceptualization—namely the complex interplay of fact and fiction as it pertains to the body-with-AIDS. For example, the body is a privileged site from which the text radiates. It can also be mistaken for the “real” body of the narrator, since Guibert himself died of AIDS. Yet because it is a deteriorating body, it depends on fictional images to survive, thus creating a body-of-writing that is the spectral image. Therefore, the body, like writing, relies on the “fake” in order to exist. The spectral image replaces the dead body (the body-with-AIDS) and creates a system of fractal representation. In this manner, it indeed manifests Baudrillard’s notion of the hyperreal and the simulacrum. This paper demonstrates how Guibert’s writing serves as an interesting example of fiction “contaminated” by the “real” and contributes to our understanding of postmodern representation and AIDS in the contemporary novel. (DW)

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